DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 496 CE 073 187

TITLE	AXIS: Accessible eXpress Intercommunication for Staff Development. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, Lancaster, Pa.
SPONS AGENCY	Pennsylvania State Dept. of Education, Harrisburg. Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education.
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	14p.; For a related handbook, see CE 073 188.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Computer Networks; Computer Oriented Programs; Computer Uses in Education; *Information Dissemination; Information Networks; *Literacy Education; Material Development; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; *Staff Development; *Statewide Planning; Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS	353 Project; *Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

Project Accessible eXpress Intercommunication for Staff development (AXIS) was undertaken to coordinate, unify, and systematize communications related to the staff development programs administered by Pennsylvania's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) by developing a unified system of print materials, online connectivity, and general communication. The following were among the main project activities: organize online communications (via America Online) and a chat forum to link Pennsylvania's regional staff development centers; maintain an online library of staff development resources; centralize and unify publications funded by ABLE; produce "The Pennsylvania Adult Basic and Literacy Education Handbook for Program Administrators, 1996 Edition"; develop a newsletter called "FOCUS on Networking" for adult literacy educators/programs and refine and establish supplier support for the adult education professional newsletter "What's The Buzz?"; produce brochures, fliers, and other materials publicizing various ABLE programs/projects; participate in and report on the activities of the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Network; and attend various meetings, workshops, and other activities related to ABLE. Despite budget and time constraints, all project goals were exceeded. The materials developed during Project AXIS were positively received and were concluded to provide communications support for ABLE staff development activities that did not previously exist. (MN)

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Final Report

ED 402 496

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AXIS:
Accessible
e**X**press
Intercommunication for
Staff development

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FY: 1995–96

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The activity which is the subject of this report was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education or the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and no official endorsement by these agencies should be inferred.

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ABSTRACT

AXIS: Accessible eXpress Intercommunication for Staff development

Project No.: 99-6012 **Funding:** (approx.) $72,000*

Project Coordinator: Tana Reiff **Phone No.:** (717) 299-8912

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PURPOSE:

To coordinate, unify, and systematize communications related to the staff development programs administered by the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education.

PROCEDURES:

Facilitated online access for nine Regional Staff Development Centers; provided text documents of newsletters for online access; developed an electronic newsletter template for the RSDCs; edited Administrators Handbook, 1996 Edition; provided design and production support for *What's the Buzz?*, *Focus on Networking*, and *Action Update*; produced fliers or brochures on statewide Section 353 initiatives, Project EQuAL, action research/practitioner inquiry projects, learning differences project, and Building Communities for Learning; completed legwork for new edition of *Freebies for ABLE*; etc.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

Provided communications support that did not previously exist; facilitated enhanced interprofessional communication.

COMMENTS:

No additional comments.

PRODUCTS:

Newsletters, brochures, etc.; samples attached to primary copy of this report

DESCRIPTORS:

*Because another function's budget was part of the AXIS budget and because a significant amount of money was unused due to printing delays, this figure estimates the original budget of AXIS only, before any money was returned to the state.

INTRODUCTION

Project AXIS was developed in response to the need expressed by the Director of the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education to coordinate, unify, and systematize communications related to the staff development programs the Bureau administers.

All of the activities described in this report were carried out between July 1, 1995, and June 30, 1996.

Project coordinator was Tana Reiff. Dr. David Karl, Director of Adult and Nonpublic Education for Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, administered the grant. Catherine McCarroll, Dr. Karl's secretary, provided clerical support for mailing, purchasing, reimbursements, and other records.

This report is prepared for anyone interested in the activities of this project. The project's products, as well as permanent copies of this report, are available through Pennsylvania's two State Literacy Resource Centers (SLRCs): AdvancE at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Harrisburg, and the Western Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Resource Center, Gibsonia.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The primary objective of Project AXIS was to improve coordination of staff development services administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, through a unified system of print materials, online connectivity, and general communication.

Specific goals related to this general objective were to:

1. Coordinate communications related to development of a competency-based staff development plan for Pennsylvania ABLE practitioners.

2. Maintain an online library of staff development resources, distribute documents and messages via electronic mail and file exchange, oversee an online "chat" forum, and facilitate realtime online conferences for staff development leaders in Pennsylvania.

3. Centralize and unify publications funded by the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education.

4. Produce *The Pennsylvania Adult Basic and Literacy Education Handbook for Program Administrators, 1996 Edition*.

5. Update at least one other publication previously produced by New Educational Projects, Inc. or another agency under contract with the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, and/or to produce other publications as needed by the Bureau.

All of the goals, with the exception of #1, were met or exceeded. AXIS did not coordinate communications related to development of a competency-based staff development plan for Pennsylvania ABLE practitioners because this plan was never carried out by the Bureau. Several other differences from the original proposal are listed later in this report.

The following activities and accomplishments, categorized by project component, were completed by Project AXIS between July 1, 1995, and June 30, 1996.

Project business:

- Established fiscal protocols with Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13.
- Complied with all IU 13 reporting requirements, including filing biweekly timesheets, monthly travel reports, and reimbursement requests.
- Filed all state-required reports.

Online activities:

- Researched online network options (freestanding bulletin board system, America Online, Prodigy, CompuServe, Pro-Net/Dial-In); selected America Online as the best option, primarily due to four factors: 1) ease of use, 2) online chat capability, 3) file attachment

support, and 4) access to its Adult Literacy forum.

- Wrote and distributed instructions for online activity to Regional Staff Development Centers (RSDCs) and provided ongoing technical support as requested.
- Assisted RSDCs in subscribing to America Online, including providing information on a purchase-order billing plan.
- Facilitated two realtime online chats for the RSDCs and the Bureau.
- Posted periodic e-mail correspondence with the nine RSDCs and two SLRCs (State Literacy Resource Centers).
- Replied to a significant amount of RSDC and other staff development e-mail.
- Collected and compiled monthly RSDC calendars for e-mail distribution.
- Set up, in cooperation with LVA, a Pennsylvania Department of Education Adult Education Staff Development message board on America Online's Adult Literacy forum and, with the Bureau, initiated and promoted online dialogues among RSDCs through the board.
- Maintained self-owned computer system and files, including new software installation, Syquest backups, desktop rebuilds, troubleshooting, etc.

Centralization and unification of publications funded by the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education:

- Designed ABLE logo and produced both Mac- and DOS-compatible PostScript files for use by anyone producing Bureau-funded publications.
- Developed a template for RSDC newsletters, in both PageMaker and ClarisWorks applications. Presented the template to the RSDCs at their September meeting and provided cross-platform files and instructions.
- Provided ongoing technical support to RSDCs producing newsletters based on the template, including critiquing each center's first issue.
- Researched and publicized a deep educational discount on Adobe PageMaker 6.0, of which several of the RSDCs took advantage.

FOCUS:

- Designed a PageMaker template for *FOCUS on Networking* newsletter, a 353 project of Royce & Royce.
- Designed graphic element, including nameplate/logo, state maps,

and Honorable Mention stamp.

- Coordinated efforts with Sherry Royce, *FOCUS* editor, on production of six four-page issues, including electronic file transfer between our offices, translation of her Windows-based PageMaker file, copy editing, and all pre-press for direct output to film.
- Liaisoned with printer.
- Created text files of all six issues and uploaded them to America Online for inclusion in the newsletter library of the Adult Literacy and Education forum.

What's the Buzz?:

- Refined a PageMaker newsletter template as designed last year for *What's the Buzz?*, the adult education professional newsletter in Pennsylvania, a project of Adult Education Linkage Services, Troy.
- Designed graphic elements, such as Teaching Tips stamp.
- Served on the editorial board and participated in two editorial board meetings.
- Established a supplier network for *Buzz*, including a new printer and mailing service in the Lancaster area.
- Produced five two-color issues of *Buzz*, including copy preparation by OCR-scanning text pages supplied by the editor, Dave Fluke; copy editing, copyfitting, typesetting, and layout; and all pre-press for direct output to film. Three issues were ten pages; the rest were eight pages.
- Liaisoned with printer and mailing service.
- Created text files of all five issues and uploaded them to America Online for inclusion in the newsletter library of the Adult Literacy forum.

Administrators Handbook:

- Formed a nine-member Editorial Board for the Administrators Handbook.
- Solicited Editorial Board input on contents of 1996 edition, based on the 1993 edition and current needs.
- Developed contents outline for the 1996 edition for additional Editorial Board review.
- Produced materials for writers (request letters, Writers' Guidelines, return card/de facto contract, biographical form, reminder notices, etc.)

- Assigned about 40 writers to approximately 50 topics.
- Surveyed 50 randomly selected Section 322 and Act 143 programs to collect information for the section on administrators' roles.
- Edited all received manuscripts and formatted them for publication.
- Produced draft manuscript and sent copies to all Editorial Board members for review.
- Designed and laid out almost the entire 64-page Handbook. (The product will be completed and distributed during the next fiscal year and enclosed with next year's final report.)

Freebies for ABLE:

- Worked closely with a marketing firm to develop a categorized mailing-list database of about 250 organizations and companies who might offer materials to be listed in *Freebies for ABLE*. Contacts were identified through: 1) listings in 1993 edition, 2) three similar books for other audiences, 3) gathering free materials randomly, and 4) adding names as suggested by the marketing firm.
- Produced a request letter describing the need, along with a cut-off return form, and an envelope to mail to the prospects.
- Mailed the request letter through Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 on June 24, 1996.
- Began receiving and processing responses at the end of June.

Other publications:

- Produced and printed a two-color, two-sided flier describing Project EQuAL (copy editing and/or writing, design, typesetting, art/photos, layout, liaison with printer), which was inserted into an issue of *What's the Buzz?* and distributed elsewhere by the Bureau.
- Produced and printed a two-color, two-sided flier describing major 1995-96 Section 353 initiatives in Pennsylvania, in cooperation with the Bureau, which was inserted into an issue of *What's the Buzz?* and distributed elsewhere by the Bureau.
- Produced and printed a tri-fold brochure describing statewide Action Research/Practitioner Inquiry initiatives, in cooperation with Allan Quigley, Alisa Belzer, and Bureau, which was distributed through the RSDCs and the Bureau.
- Produced and printed a tri-fold brochure describing the statewide Learning Differences initiative, in cooperation with Dr. Richard Cooper and the Bureau, which was distributed through the RSDCs

and the Bureau.

- Designed and produced two editions of the *Action Research Handbook* for the Pennsylvania Action Research Network project headed by Dr. Allan Quigley at Penn State Monroeville.
- Produced an eight-page Building Communities for Learning brochure for the Pennsylvania State Coalition for Adult Literacy with Cheryl Keenan and JoAnn Weinberger.
- Consulted with Cheryl Harmon at AdvancE about coordination of AdvancE's online communication efforts with the RSDCs.
- Compiled and produced a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) sheet on online activity and publication production for the RSDCs.
- Wrote and designed the first draft of a brochure describing the functions and services of the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education.
- Designed and printed a logo and collateral for AXIS, necessitated by confusion surrounding use of the Intermediate Unit letterhead.

PALPIN (Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network, University of Pennsylvania):

- Joined the Region 6 practitioner inquiry community, as suggested by its facilitators, who felt I should participate firsthand rather than merely attend a meeting to observe the process.
- Participated in all six meetings of the Region 6 community.
- Met several times with my inquiry small group between large-group meetings.
- Researched, developed, and produced an inquiry project and report.

Related meetings and activities:

- Attended and presented at four full-day RSDC meetings throughout the year.
- Served on the Staff Development Workgroup, which met twice.
- Attended three of five full-day ALTIN (Adult Literacy Technology Innovation Network) trainings.
- Met with the Bureau Director, Chief of Special Programs and Projects, and staff development advisor eight times through the year to update them on Project AXIS progress and discuss plans.
- Attended three board meetings of the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE).
- Edited four quarterly issues of *PAACE News*, as a service to the

Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education, the state professional association for adult education.

- Attended COABE '96, the national conference of American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, Commission on Adult Basic Education, held in Pittsburgh May 16-18, 1996, and hosted by the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education with sponsorship from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. As a service to PAACE, produced the 120+-page conference program book, mostly after hours.
- Served as a Section 353 proposal reader.
- Attended two teleconferences, one on Family Literacy on December 14, 1995, the other on Workforce Development on June 20, 1996.

The activities described in this report differed from those described in the original proposal in the following ways:

- Employment was for an average of at least 28 hours per week for 12 months, with 15 days' vacation time.
- Did not become involved in USDOE/Pelavin's Pro-Net online because of software delays and installation problems and because of access difficulties.
- Did not print or release *Administrators Handbook* due to internal constraints at the Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- Did not complete *Freebies* (i.e. "one other publication previously produced by New Education Projects, Inc. or another agency ... ") because of time constraints.
- Produced an array of publications that were not specified in the proposal.

EVALUATION

A key evaluation instrument was intended to be an evaluation form inserted into the Administrators Handbook, but because that publication has not yet been released as of this writing, there are no responses to report.

Another evaluation method was to periodically report on progress to the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, which was done. The bulk of that reporting is included in this report.

A self-assessment of the project is that it greatly exceeded goals and fulfilled a need for improved communications. Negatives included the limitations of budget, time, RSDCs' publication-production capabili-

ties, and approval requirements at the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Support and cooperation to AXIS on the part of the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education was excellent, constant, and very much appreciated.

Our efforts to place text-only documents online for random downloading was somewhat disappointing because we had to depend on others to actually place the material on America Online's Adult Literacy and Education forum.

At the June 13, 1996 meeting of the 1996-97 Professional Development Center directors and coordinators (replacing the RSDCs), we distributed an AXIS Communications Survey to reflect on the 1995-96 year. As of this writing, only a few of the forms had been returned, but the following comments related to AXIS performance appeared on those we received:

[With regard to online communication of all types, are you better off than you were a year ago?]

"Absolutely! One year ago I didn't have a clue as to how to use AOL or access the Internet."

"Yes! We have a e-mail address and use e-mail a lot. We like the convenience of e-mail."

" ... improved communication between centers."

Other comments of note:

"I appreciate your help. I think you did an excellent job presenting a 'state identity.' I hope that you will continue encouraging us all! I think you had a difficult job keeping a 'state identity' and allowing room for regional creativity - as well as Buzz creativity. Thanks."

"I found it very helpful that AXIS coordinated publication of Statewide Initiatives. The information brochures were excellent and used in the Region."

"Enjoyed working with Tana - easily accessible. Like the newsletter template. Forced us to get on-line and use it —> good!"

Some of the form's questions concerned how the RSDCs would like to be using online capabilities. Several desired more use of e-mail, message boarding, and the World Wide Web. There was some reservation about realtime online chatting, which can be confusing, and listservs (mailing lists), which can be time-consuming in relation to their usefulness.

Also, there was mention of the need for more training in how to

download software and graphic files, a better system for collecting the regional calendars of events, and more time for Web "surfing." (It should be noted that AXIS was not funded to provide training as such; this was the role of the ALTIN project, although ALTIN was not related to graphic production.)

DISSEMINATION

AXIS products have been distributed in various ways, as appropriate to the material (newsletter direct mailings, newsletter inserts, regional mailings, handouts, targeted mailings, e-mail, online postings, etc.). All of the print materials produced by this project may be requested through Pennsylvania's State Literacy Resource Centers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Briefly, it is the Project Coordinator's opinion that the existence and reliable operation of a central communications hub, primarily for staff development purposes, such as AXIS has served to be, is an essential component of the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education's total program. This project provided communications support that did not previously exist.

The print publications were positively received and served the purpose of unifying and improving communication among adult basic and literacy education staff developers in Pennsylvania and to the field.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this project has been enhanced interprofessional communication. With all of the nine RSDCs, two SLRCs, and three Bureau staff members online, we all experienced a much greater volume and depth of communication among each other. For the first time, thanks primarily to electronic mail, we could ask each other questions virtually instantly, get quick responses, and disseminate information uniformly and efficiently. There is no question that we would not have written as many letters or made as many phone calls as we dashed off e-mail to one another. Many of the RSDC directors and coordinators spoke face to face only at quarterly meetings and annual conferences, but by the end of this fiscal year, their collegiality had grown observably.

We recommend indefinite continuation of Project AXIS and its functions, particularly in further unifying and enhancing the quality of publications. In addition, we recommend development of a site on the

World Wide Web that could be constantly supplied with professional development documents related to adult basic and literacy education in Pennsylvania.

Indeed, AXIS has been funded for 1996-97 with a slightly altered focus, i.e. AXIS will forthwith stand for **A**dult education e**X**press **I**nter-communication **S**upport. This change represents a recognition that AXIS fulfills a support role, that "staff development" is now more aptly referred to as "professional development," and that AXIS communication serves an audience greater than Pennsylvania adult education professional developers alone.■

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